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ABSTRACT

Concerned with the sharp decline of students in French language classes in recent years, the present study examined a set of intra-school factors that might be related to the decline. Altogether 85 French language teachers and 78 principals at elementary and secondary levels in 14 school divisions in Southwestern Manitoba participated in the survey. It was found that a notable proportion of teachers were inadequately prepared professionally. Their methods of teaching have not been diversified enough to accommodate students' capabilities or interests, and they were unfamiliar with new concepts of organizing materials. A considerable proportion of principals showed lack of enthusiasm for bilingual education. Limited school resources in many cases added to the difficulty of developing a better French language program. At another level, it was found that the quality of the program was much the result of priorities and policies of the school board concerned. (Author)

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A CLOSER LOOK IN SOUTH-WESTERN MANITOBA SCHOOLS

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FRENCH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION:

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Probably no other curricular issue in our public educational system has triggered so much critical attention, debate and emotional outcries as bilingual education. The very fact that success or failure of this program will have far-reaching political, social, cultural and economic implications for Canada, has transformed the issue from the concern of a few professionals to that of the general public. While Canada is not the sole country confronted with problems originating from a multi-cultural nature of society, it is certainly a forerunner in conducting a social experiment with the final objective of achieving "unity through diversity." Since October 8th, 1971, Canada officially adopted a policy of multi-culturalism within a bilingual framework. Such a policy heralded a period of frantic activities, undertaken by governments at all levels and millions of dollars have poured in to promote programs to give reality to the much advertised "cultural mosaic" concept. Manitoba, not dissimilar from the rest of the country, was also engulfed by the tide of official fervour. Programs of French language, designed primarily as a sequence for the secondary school students, were extended in a similar fashion to primary grades. The audio-lingual approach of second language teaching gained wider acceptance at the expense of traditional methods (Corriveau, 1970). 1970 saw the establishment of a Second Language Coun-

cil, charged with the mission of evaluating the place of a second language in the curriculum of elementary and secondary schools in Manitoba. In 1971, the Manitoba Legislature endorsed Bill 113, which authorized the use of English and French as the official languages of instruction for the province. A "Bureau de l'Éducation Française" was set up as a permanent separate branch of the Department of Education. The Manitoba Teachers' Society empowered "Éducateurs Franco-Manitobains" to oversee professional development of teachers using French as the language of instruction (Gisiger, 1975)

Paradoxically, amidst official patronage and professional support, there has been a noted, steady decline in the number of students enrolled in second language classes in many provinces (Howard, 1973; Earl, 1975). In Manitoba, the number of students studying French in high schools has declined by more than fifty per cent and this number is still decreasing.

The growing concern in this area has led to a pilot investigation in one school division and it was reported that students' choice was the main reason for a diminished enrollment (Earl, 1975).

While there is little doubt that student choice is the most apparent, and most readily identifiable reason for enrollment decline, it is probably a superficial and oversimplified factor that belies a host of real, complex reasons that govern such a student choice. To be more explicit, individual choice is the result of one's attitude, which, in turn, is an interactive product of such aspects as parental attitudes, attitudes of "significant others" (i.e. peer, relatives, etc.), educational institutional set-ups, community and changing societal values. Perhaps, no other incident had demonstrated more clearly this fact than the case of the notable St. Lambert

experiment (Holden, 1974). Children going through the experimental program did demand more French, whereas children in the regular stream who sat through only a single period of French a day said that they wanted less. Apparently, degree of parental encouragement and momentum picked up from the nature of the program, must offer parts of the explanation for the observable individual reaction and decision.

Granted that factors accounting for enrollment decline in second language classes, notably French, are complicated and embedded in a variety of sectors, a logical direction in the initial exploration of this domain should be geared toward our school system. Gulutsan (1972) asserted that if Canada is, and should continue to be, a multi-cultural society, Canadian schools should actively preserve and promote cultural diversity. Remnant (1974) went further by stressing that without schools' active engagement in the process of implementation, the policy of multiculturalism is doomed before it starts.

The present survey is primarily concerned with the present enrollment figures of students taking French language in South-western Manitoba schools, with a close examination of intra-school factors that might provide answers to the declining enrollment.

Altogether, 14 divisions consented to participate in the survey. Two sets of questionnaires were sent respectively to the principals and teachers responsible for French language instruction. Out of 100 questionnaires sent to the principals, 78 returned and out of 127 sent to the French language teachers, 85 responded, which is close to 70 per cent of the total sample.

RESULTS:

A. Enrollment Figures in French Language Classes

In order to analyze enrollment in French language classes with greater clarity, data were organized by types of schools. Owing to the great diversity in terms of grades, individual school organizations displayed, three categories were delineated, namely: Elementary Schools (schools having class levels stretching from kindergarten to grade 6); Elementary-High Schools (those having both elementary and secondary class levels); and High Schools (those having class levels from grade 7 onwards).

TABLE I

STUDENT ENROLLMENTS IN FRENCH LANGUAGE CLASSES

(At Various Sampled Schools)

Types of Schools	No. of Schools	Total Student Population	No. of Students Taking French	% of Students Taking French
Elementary	20	3887	1623	42%
Elementary-High	28	8472	2928	35%
Secondary	30	12680	4299	34%
Total	78	25039	8850	35.3%

Table I denotes that the overall enrollment of students taking French as a second language in South-western Manitoba schools was not high. Out of the total student population of 25,039 in the sampled schools, only 8,850, which constitutes 35.3% were enrolled in the French classes. When

examining this figure by types of school, it was found that elementary schools had by far the highest proportion (42%) followed by elementary-high schools (35%) and the high schools (34%). While longitudinal studies should be conducted to ratify the real trend of enrollment, the observed data seems to suggest that decline of enrollment is inversely related to grades.

B. Intra-School Conditions

To understand more fully the observed low enrollment in French language classes, four intra-school aspects which receive considerable attention in research literature for their relevancy in the teaching of second language were singled out for close examination. These are: Teachers' professional preparation in second language; teachers' instructional methods; teachers' and principals' attitudes toward teaching French; and the amount of school resources available for second language instruction. Each of these was discussed as follows:

(i) Teachers' Professional Preparation

The professional preparation of teachers has always been a key factor associated with success or failure of a program. With the multitude of options available to students in the present-day curriculum, the single important factor for inducing students into selecting the more demanding second language courses, as suggested by McConnell (1973), is the individual classroom teacher. An energetic, highly motivated teacher of French, in full command of his subject would certainly make a great difference in terms of his enrollment, compared with "a dull, poorly prepared pedestrian teacher." In examining our sampled teachers, it was found that 83.5% had some advanced studies of French at the university level. However, in terms

of French method courses they took, it was surprising to note that a considerable proportion (36.5%) of the sampled teachers had not taken any. In terms of school division breakdown, six divisions namely, Divisions 32, 37, 39, 40, 41, and 44 stood out as having a greater proportion of teachers (50% or over) that admitted they had had no method course.

Looking at this aspect at the individual level it was found that French language teachers with mother tongue being French, had a greater percentage (44% vs. 30%) that had no formal training in instructional methods, and that the average number of method courses taken were slightly less than in the case of those teachers who acquired French as a second language (Table II). In brief, it is fairly evident that despite some degree of made-up inservice training, the professional preparation of teachers is far from adequate. Further, the present mode of preparing of French language instructors by universities and training institutions, and the hiring procedures adopted by the school boards ought to be scrutinized.

TABLE II

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF FRENCH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Teacher Background	Formal Training		No Formal Training		Average Number of Method Courses taken
	No.	%	No.	%	
Teachers with French as Mother Tongue	15	56	12	44	1.6
Teachers Acquiring French as a Second Language	41	70	18	30	2

(ii) Teachers' Instructional Methods

An immediate aspect, following the disclosure of teacher preparation of instruction were the methods of instruction used in the classroom. Responses of the teachers revealed that there were no predominant methods employed: There were 11.8% of teachers using traditional methods, 10.6% using direct methods, 17.6% using audio-visual methods, 35.4% using a combination of two methods, and 22.4% reporting the employment of a diversity of approaches.

While the present stage of knowledge is still inadequate for providing a satisfactory solution to the basic difficulties of second language learning (Stern, 1970), so that the superiority of any single method cannot be ascertained, there is sufficient documentation in literature to show that diversity of methods is essential to accommodate different learning patterns and provide for the capabilities of individual students. That only 22.4% of the sample teachers were found to be diversified in their approaches to French language instruction conveys the picture that an average teaching-learning situation in South-western Manitoba schools is too rigidly structured.

Such an apparent lack of diversification in instructional approaches can hardly be attributed to the lack of teaching autonomy. Over 65.9%, indeed, indicated that they had great autonomy in revising the programs and in changing testbooks. Further reference to specific classroom activities shows that though teaching aids, e.g. recorders, record players, slides, overhead projectors, posters and songs were also fairly commonly used, pooling of resource materials in "cultural islands" was still foreign to them, as over 70.6% did not have that kind of arrangement and 20% did not know

what "cultural islands" were.

(iii) Teachers' and Principals' Attitudes Toward the French Language

Attitudes consciously and more frequently unconsciously expressed by the teaching staff and school administrators toward French language instruction affect students' attitude to the language course in a multitude of ways. Basically, what teachers cherish often tailor the subsequent learning activities in the classroom. These, in turn, either tune up or dampen students' enthusiasm toward French language studies. Likewise, principals, as professional leaders of the institutions play a vital role both in the implementation and development of a program. In view of their actual and potential influence on the programs, their attitudes towards many aspects of the French language instructors, were carefully examined in turn.

A. Teachers' Attitudes

It is interesting to note that a considerable proportion of the sampled teachers (35.3%) favoured the teaching of French-Canadian French versus the 37.6% of those, who preferred the teaching of standard international French. Only slightly over one-half (58.8%) believed that French should be taught in French, while a notable 41.2% felt that it should be taught in English and French. To the question of when French should be taught, most teachers strongly believed that instruction should begin at kindergarten and primary grades. This is consistent with the predominant thinking in the field of second language instruction that the earlier a child is exposed to a second language, the less difficulty he would experience in learning it. (Penfield and Roberts, 1955).

On the whole, almost all the teachers (96.5%) agreed that

learning another language is an enriching experience for students. But over half (64.7%) strongly indicated that not all students should take French at school. Reasons offered by the teachers are many, but generally speaking, they fall into five categories. Some feel that many students do not possess the ability to learn French; some feel that the students lack interest and motivation to learn the language; some teachers feel that the present educational system does not make the learning of French attractive enough; some believe that there are other languages equally beneficial to students; and, there are still others who feel that the administration of the schools and the multi-ethnic nature of the community render it impossible for all students to take French.

Turning to the major purposes of teaching French in school, some of the teachers (45.9%) indicated that it was to make everyone bilingual. However, a greater proportion (54.1%) either disagreed or reversed their comments. Nowhere else, indeed, has it been demonstrated with greater clarity than here that the official endorsement of bilingualism remains an ideal rather than a reality when teachers at the grass-root level, for one reason or another, do not feel that the teaching of French in school is a means of achieving bilingualism.

B. Principals' Attitude

Turning to principals' attitude toward bilingual education in school, it was surprising to note that only 47.4% felt that bilingualism should consist of English and French. Some 46.2% denied it should be so and 6.4% remained uncommitted. When further asked if bilingualism had been adequately achieved, 64.1% admitted it had not, while 26.9% responded it had, and 9% did not respond. Apparently, "bilingualism" was acknowledged to be inadequately implemented in the school and many principals perceive the term

to include a second language, not necessarily French. In spite of these feelings, it was found that French was still the predominant second language taught in schools (76.3%) while German was a poor second (6.4%). There was a notable proportion of schools which did not offer a second language at all.

From the responses of principals and the actual conditions in the school, one can detect a general note of apathy among most and ambiguity among a few of these professional leaders regarding the significance of French language instruction in school. This assertion is vividly substantiated when the school resources are examined in the following section.

(iv) School Resources

Another aspect of school operation that provides insight into the present condition of the French language instruction is the amount of school resources: both human and material, that are available to support French language programs. A contextual factor that is often cited in literature as an indicator of school resources, i.e., size, was first examined. The correlational analysis indicated that the school size, measured in terms of total student population in the school were unrelated to the proportion of students attending French language classes ($r = 1.234$; $P < .05$).

Turning to the attitudinal analysis, it was found, from the principals' responses, that about 48% of the sampled schools indicated that they had specially qualified persons to teach French. One quarter of the sampled schools on the other hand, admitted that they had no such personnel available. Further, of those schools that had qualified personnel to look after French language instruction, over 65% reported that they did not have more than one teacher in the school to teach French.

In terms of other resources, over 82% of the sampled teachers

reported that there were no physical set-ups in the school especially designed for language instruction. In discussing the impediments to French programs, a dominant proportion of principals (41%) singled out that the lack of interest on the part of students, school and community was the major reason. Some 26.9% of the sampled principals attributed it to lack of money and qualified teachers. While the lack of qualified personnel in some school divisions is readily apparent (refer to the previous analysis of teachers' professional preparation), the lack of money for the French language instruction only reinforces the stipulation that such a program has received low priority in many school divisions.

In brief, it can be inferred that as far as school resources are concerned, neither human nor physical and material resources were optimal to the development of a second language instruction. This could be attributed to a lack of commitment on the part of school and community to see that the program is implemented successfully.

C. Other Analyses

Owing to the apparent variations in terms of students enrolled in French language classes among school districts, additional one-way analyses of variance were done to detect whether there were inter-school district variations in this respect. The results indicated that three divisions, namely, Numbers 41, 32, and 43 had significantly higher enrollment figures than most of the remaining eleven school divisions (Table III). Detailed proportional comparisons (z's comparisons, Table IV) of the various inter-school divisions reveal that these three districts did differ from a number of other districts in terms of the kind of French taught, methods of teach-

ing, autonomy of organizing learning activities and teachers' attitudes and goals of French language. However, no conspicuous pattern distinguishing these three districts from the rest can be identified.

TABLE III

INTER-SCHOOL DISTRICT VARIATIONS IN FRENCH LANGUAGE ENROLLMENTS

(Summary of Significant F Ratios from ONE-WAY ANOVA)

SCHOOL DISTRICTS	24	31	33	37	38	39	40	42
32						11.23**	11.00**	
41				5.90*		10.64**	10.88**	
43	21.99**	13.66**	23.20**	23.20**	7.81*	48.22**	40.53**	6.94*

* significant at 0.05 level
** significant at 0.01 level

TABLE IV

INTER-SCHOOL DISTRICTS COMPARISONS IN MULTIFACETS OF FRENCH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTIONS

(Summary of All Significant Z's)

ITEM / SCHOOL DISTRICTS COMPARED	Kinds of French Taught	Methods of Teaching (Diversity of)	Physical Set-up for French Instruction	Autonomy in French Teaching	Goals of Teaching French	Principals' Perception of Extent Bilingualism is gained
32 - 39			2.05*			
32 - 40					2.10*	
41 - 37	2.38*			2.04*	1.97*	
41 - 39						
41 - 40					3.36**	
43 - 24				2.23*	2.30*	2.01*
43 - 31						2.19*
43 - 33						
43 - 37						
43 - 38						
43 - 39					2.07*	
43 - 40		2.71**				
43 - 42				2.23*	2.30*	

* significant at 0.05
** significant at 0.01

Two contextual factors, i.e. ethnic nature of the community and the policies of the three school boards were subsequently examined. With respect to the first factor, it was found that there were no predominant French segments in the communities. Rather, there were, as in other districts, mixed ethnic groups of Anglo-Saxon, Ukranian, Scandinavian, French and Native origins. Thus, it would seem that higher enrollment in French language classes in these three divisions could not be explained in terms of ethnic nature of the communities.

With respect to the second contextual factor, it was found, however, that there were explicit policies laid down by these three divisions regarding bilingualism. The divisions, indeed, encouraged the study of a second language in its schools.

Summary

In spite of official enthusiasm and patronage of bilingualism and biculturalism, there were reports of steady decline in numbers of students enrolled in French language classes in Manitoba, as well as in other provinces. The present study confirmed that the number of students taking French as a second language in South-western Manitoba schools was low. This was particularly so in secondary schools.

Analyses of four intra-school factors, namely, teachers' professional preparation for French language instruction, the instructional methods being employed, teachers' and principals' attitudes toward French language programs and school resources uncovered some possible reasons for enrollment decline in French language study. A notable proportion of teachers in the rural south-western divisions proved to be professionally inadequately pre-

pared as a large percentage does not have any formal training other than condensed in-service sessions. Their methods of teaching have not been diversified enough to accommodate either student capability or interest, and they have not been familiar with some of the new concepts of organizing materials for French language instruction. Subsequently, they were unable to fully utilize the kind of autonomy they now enjoy. A considerable proportion of principals, too, cherish ambiguous feelings towards bilingual education. Their apparent lack of enthusiasm for a full-fledged development of French language programs was cited in a number of cases by teachers, as a reason for the impossibility of making French language studies compulsory to all students. As far as school resources are concerned, the situation is again far from ideal. This can be attributed, not so much to the size of the school, but rather to the low priority or importance attached to French language programs.

Inter-school division comparisons further show that it was the policies of the boards, rather than the ethnic nature of the community toward bilingual education that account for variation of student enrollment in French language classes.

In retrospect, intra-school factor analysis reveals clearly that the decline of enrollment in French language classes is the responsibility of many people. The universities and teacher-training institutions have the responsibility of seeing that the teachers are professionally well-prepared. Teachers and principals should have greater commitment in seeing that the French programs are being successfully implemented in schools. The school boards should have the responsibility of carefully screening personnel to be entrusted with the job of teaching French language and of vigorously pur-

suing a bilingual educational policy. The provincial and the federal governments should have the responsibility of seeing that funds are adequately provided for the purpose. The success of immersion programs as documented in many reports (See Swain, 1974) entails a fundamental restructuring of elementary curriculum that calls for substantial financial support at various levels of official agencies, but notably provincial and federal governments. However, if the national ideal of bilingualism and bi-culturalism is to survive, we should be ready to pay the price.

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